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ABSTRACT

This report presents basic data about Latino students in the public schools of Massachusetts. Recent population data on Latino youth and public school enrollment are presented, highlighting the areas of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts where Latinos are densely concentrated. The report then considers the achievement of Latino students in the schools, highlighting recently published cohort dropout data and Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment Test (MCAS) results for Latinos. The report also looks at the after-school plans of Latino graduates. Among all Massachusetts youth 19 years of age or younger, Latinos represent 8.8%. In 1997, 92,306 Latino students were enrolled in public schools in Massachusetts, accounting for 9.7% of the total number of children enrolled in grades K-12. Projections show that 29% of Latino students that began ninth grade in 1998 are at high risk of dropping out, a rate almost 3 times that of White students. The high rates of school dropout for Latino children are a grave concern for parents and educators. As is true for dropout rates, the outcomes of Latino students on standardized tests are the worst in the state. Latinos appear to be the group most vulnerable to the negative outcomes predicted to result from the use of high-stakes standardized tests. Latino students would benefit greatly from true educational reform, but they will bear the highest burden as the process of reform becomes institutionalized. As new requirements, especially reliance on the MCAS, are implemented, many Latino students will not be able to obtain a high school diploma, and dropout rates may also increase. (Contains 12 figures, 4 tables, and 27 endnotes.) (SLD)

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The Mauricio Gastón Institute for Latino Community Development and Public Policy

Latino Students and the Massachusetts Public Schools

by Miren Uriarte
and Lisa Chavez

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Latino Students and the Massachusetts Public Schools

by Miren Uriarte and Lisa Chavez

A Report Prepared for
The Mauricio Gastón Institute
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About the Authors

Miren Uriarte, PhD, is a sociologist and faculty member of the College of Public and Community Service of the University of Massachusetts Boston. The founding director of the Mauricio Gastón Institute, she is currently a faculty research affiliate of the institute. She has written on the impact of public policy issues, such as education, employment and training, poverty, and reduced access to services in the Latino community. Her current research focuses on issues pertaining to community development and community institutions.

Lisa Chavez is a PhD candidate in the department of sociology at the University of California, Berkeley. She is finishing her dissertation research examining the underrepresentation of Latinos at four- year colleges.

This paper is part of a series of reports that seek to address the social and economic status of Latinos in Massachusetts.

Miren Uriarte and Lisa Chavez

Latino Students and the Massachusetts Public Schools

The education of Latino children in Massachusetts has been an elusive ideal for the Latino community. During the 1950s and 1960s, large numbers of Latino children went uneducated. Studies of the time reveal that, in Boston, thousands of Latino children were not attending school because of the exclusionary practices of the school system.[1] The children of Puerto Rican migrant workers, who made up the bulk of the Latino community at that time, faced many barriers to enrolling in school. Those that did enroll faced English-only classrooms and little space for the valuation of their culture. The experience in Boston was not unique and eventually became the impetus for a national movement of Latino parents for the development of educational opportunities for Latino children. The struggle in Massachusetts led to the first state-mandated, transitional bilingual-education program in the United States in 1969. Other states followed the example of Massachusetts.

By the 1970s, Latino enrollments in Massachusetts public schools had increased significantly as the population grew and bilingual programs were established. Growing numbers of Latino children enrolled in schools in Boston, Lawrence, and Springfield, the areas of largest Latino concentration, while others began to settle in Worcester, Lowell, and Chelsea, cities that soon became large Latino settlements as well. In Boston, where most Latino children went to school, education was hard to achieve as the city exploded in violent reaction to the federal court order to desegregate the Boston public schools in the early 1970s. Latino parents found themselves torn between the ideals of desegregation and the need to protect the interests of their multiracial children in a system polarized racially in black and white. Much organizing energy from the community and its advocates went into seeking protection for Latino children during the desegregation process, as well as to guaranteeing effective implementation of bilingual-education programs.

The problem of access to the state's educational institutions gave way in the 1980s to concerns over dire outcomes for Latino children in the Commonwealth's public schools. Although one could argue that in the last two decades Latinos had earned a "place" in the educational institutions of the state, the educational outcomes of Latino children demonstrated just how tenuous that "place" was and how vulnerable Latino children continued to be in school. During the 1980s, Latino children had the lowest levels of achievement and the highest dropout and truancy rates of any group.[2] By this time, Latino children filled the classrooms of many cities and towns in Massachusetts.

By the 1990s, Massachusetts had embarked on a process of educational reform. There was no group that would stand to gain more than Latinos from changes to improve the expe-

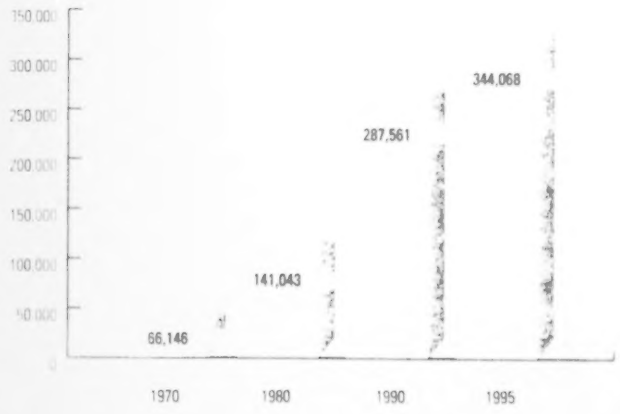
rience of children in the schools. But, after almost ten years of school reform and close to forty years since the beginning of the struggle to gain the right of public education for Latino children in Massachusetts, this report brings mixed news.

On the one hand, Latino enrollments continued to grow during the 1990s. Latino children now attend school in most areas of the state and represent a much broader range of national groups, expanding from the original group of Puerto Ricans to include Dominicans and Central and South Americans.

On the other hand, almost ten years of educational reform initiatives seem to have left Latinos untouched. According to 1998 cohort dropout data from the Massachusetts Department of Education (DOE), 29% of Latino 9th graders in Massachusetts will probably not finish high school, again the highest dropout rate for any group in the state and almost three times that of white students. Latinos also have the highest failure rates in all areas, for all grades, in the first year of testing using the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS).[3]

This report presents basic information about Latino students in the public schools of Massachusetts. First, recent population data on Latino youth and public school enrollment are presented, highlighting those areas of the Commonwealth where Latinos are densely concentrated. The report then proceeds to the achievement of Latino students in the schools, highlighting recently published cohort dropout data and MCAS test results for Latinos. Finally, the report examines the after-high-school plans of Latino graduates.

Figure 1
Latino Population of Massachusetts, 1970–1995



Source: Data for 1970 and 1980 are taken from Ralph Rivera, *Latinos in Massachusetts and the 1990 U.S. Census: Growth and Geographic Distribution* (Boston: Mauricio Gastón Institute for Latino Community Development and Public Policy, UMASS Boston, 1991). Data for 1990 and 1995 are from "April 1, 1990 Population and July 1, 1995 Estimates for Massachusetts," data file prepared by the Massachusetts Institute for Social and Economic Research (MISER), University of Massachusetts, Amherst, June 1997.

Massachusetts Latino Youth Population

Population reports document that the Latino population of Massachusetts continued to experience rapid growth during the first half of the 1990s (see figure 1). Between 1990 and 1995, the number of Latinos in Massachusetts grew from 287,561 to 344,068, an increase of close to 20%.[4] Assuming a similar rate of growth during the rest of the decade, about 400,000 Latinos will live in Massachusetts by the year 2000.

Although this is a substantial rate of growth, current growth rates represent a significant slow down when compared with the rates of growth of past decades. Between 1980 and 1990, the rate of growth of the state's Latino

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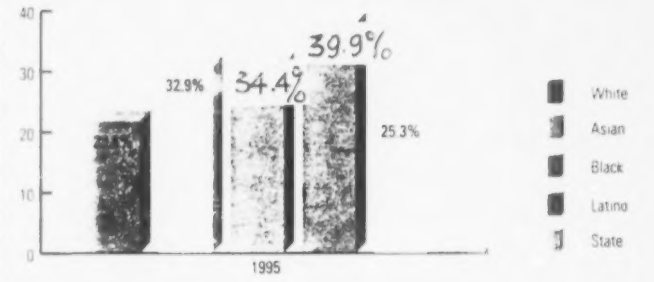
population was 104%, and it was even greater than that, 113%, between 1970 and 1980.[5] It appears that after several decades of prodigious growth, the Latino population of Massachusetts is stabilizing.

Over the last three decades, the number of Latinos has continued to grow in areas of high concentration as well as in other regions across the state. In 1970, only Boston had a Latino population of more than 10,000 people.[6] By 1980, the Latino communities of Lawrence and Springfield had attained that size and Boston's Latino population had doubled.[7] By 1990, Holyoke, Lowell, and Worcester also had Latino populations of more than 10,000 persons, while the Latino population of Boston had again doubled and that of Lawrence had tripled.[8] By 1995, Lynn and Chelsea had attained a Latino population of 10,000 with Cambridge, Framingham, New Bedford, and Brockton rapidly approaching that number as well.[9] Boston's Latino population in 1995 was estimated at 76,868; in twenty-five years, the Latino population of Boston had increased seven-fold.

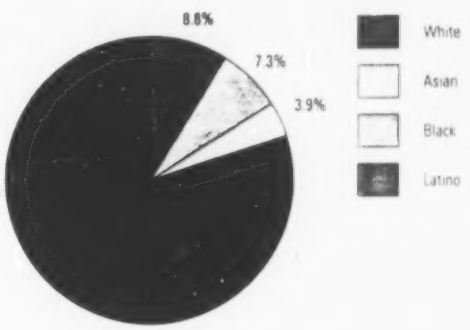
Massachusetts Latinos are also becoming an increasingly diverse group in terms of national background. Historically, Puerto Ricans have represented the largest national group within the Latino population, about 75% or more during the 1970s.[10] By 1990, Puerto Ricans accounted for 53% of Latinos in Massachusetts, the remainder consisting of Dominicans, Central Americans, South Americans, Mexicans, and Cubans.[11]

Figure 2
Percent of the Population Under 19 in Each Racial/Ethnic Group, 1990 and 1995



Source: Massachusetts Institute for Social and Economic Research (MISER), "April 1, 1990 Population and July 1, 1995 Estimates for Massachusetts," June 1997

Figure 3
Racial/Ethnic Composition of the Population Under 19, 1995



Source: Massachusetts Institute for Social and Economic Research (MISER), "April 1, 1990 Population and July 1, 1995 Estimates for Massachusetts," June 1997

The Latino population is the youngest in the state with a median age of twenty-two. In 1995, two out of every five Latinos (39.9%) were under nineteen years of age (see figure 2). Youth compose a larger proportion of the Latino population than white, black, or Asian youth represent within their respective groups.

Among all Massachusetts youth nineteen years of age or younger, Latinos are the second-largest group, second only to whites. Figure 3 shows that Latinos age nineteen and younger represent 8.8% of all persons of that age cohort in Massachusetts. Since 1990, Latino youth have been the largest minority youth population in the Commonwealth.

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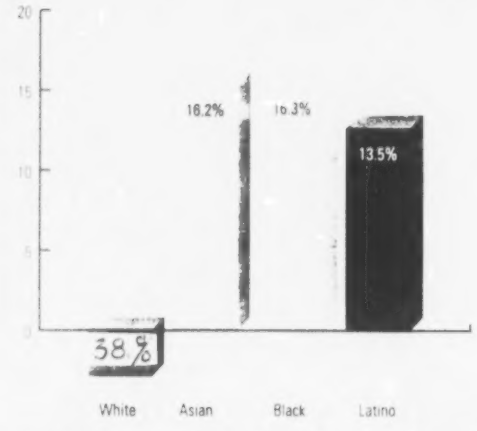
Figure 4
Percent Change in the Population Under 19 by Race, 1990 and 1995



Source: Massachusetts Institute for Social and Economic Research (MISER). "April 1, 1990 Population and July 1, 1995 Estimates for Massachusetts." June 1997

Along with the overall Latino population, the number of Latino youth in Massachusetts has increased. From 1990 to 1995, the number of Latinos that were nineteen or younger increased from 120,825 to 137,165, a rate of growth of 13.5%, only slightly lower than that of the overall Latino population's rate of 20% (see figure 4).

But, as is true of the overall Latino population, it appears that the growth in the Latino youth population is also slowing down. Between 1990 and 1995, the rate of growth in the numbers of Latino youth was the lowest of all minority youth groups, second only to the white youth population, which decreased in size. During this time, all minority groups increased their share of population, but this tendency was slightly lower among Latino youth.

Latino School Enrollment

In 1997, 92,306 Latino students were enrolled in public schools in Massachusetts, accounting for 9.7% of the total number of children enrolled in grades K-12. This represents an increase of 81.5% from the 50,866 Latino school children counted in 1987 (see tables 1 and 2). As is the case for the population growth, the geographic distribution of Latino school enrollments mirrors the distribution of the state's Latino population. Boston has the largest number of Latinos and Latino enrollments, but Latinos make up a lower percentage of the population and share of enrollments.

Other cities and towns have denser Latino populations and, by extension, a much higher percentage of Latino children in their classrooms. For example, in 1997, Boston had the highest number of Latino students enrolled in its schools (15,889), as has been the case for almost thirty years. Latinos account for about 25% of the Boston enrollments. In contrast, school districts such as Lawrence, Holyoke, and Chelsea, had fewer students enrolled, but Latino students accounted for 78.4%, 68.7%, and 65.2%, respectively, of the total number of students enrolled in those districts. The students enrolled in the cities listed in table 1 account for 76.6% of the Latino children enrolled in grades K-12 in Massachusetts.

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Latino enrollments in Massachusetts increased by 81.5% from 1987 to 1997. Many school districts have experienced growth in the number of Latino students attending their schools, some experiencing very significant growth in the number of Latino students, which in some cases, doubled or tripled in those ten years. Table 2 shows the school districts with the largest rates of growth in the number of Latino students. Given the pressures on the school system when the population of its students changes rapidly, these are districts that are managing a very large change in their midst.

Table 1
Rank Order of School Districts According to the Number of Latinos Enrolled[12] and the Percentage of Students That Are Latino, 1997

Number of Latinos Enrolled		Percent Latino	
State	**92,306**	Lawrence	78.4
Boston	15,889	Holyoke	68.7
Springfield	9,535	Chelsea	65.2
Lawrence	8,983	Springfield	40.1
Worcester	6,220	Southbridge	31.8
Holyoke	5,144	Worcester	26.9
Lowell	3,455	Boston	25.7
Lynn	3,431	Fitchburg	24.9
Chelsea	3,421	Salem	24.7
New Bedford	2,007	Lynn	24.3
Brockton	1,938	Lowell	21.8
Fitchburg	1,365	Somerville	18.3
Salem	1,196	Waltham	17.1
Chicopee	1,096	Framingham	15.5
Framingham	1,182	Chicopee	14.6
Haverhill	1,090	Cambridge	14.3
Somerville	1,031	**State**	**9.7**

Source: Massachusetts Department of Education, "School and School Districts Profiles," www.doe.mass.edu/pic/www/profmain.html

Educational Outcomes of Latino Students

How well are Latino children in Massachusetts doing in school? The school experience of individual children is usually measured by their performance in the classroom and is something that varies greatly. How well a student does depends, among many factors, on the quality of the school, the ability of the teacher and other school personnel, the readiness and motivation of the child, and the support of her family.

The aggregate results of those individual experiences, though, give some indication of how Latinos as a group are faring in the Massachusetts public schools. The number of students who complete school and who drop out without finishing high school, the number of graduates who continue their education or professional training, and students' scores in standardized tests are just some of the measures that educational systems use to assess these outcomes.

Table 2
Massachusetts School Districts With the Highest Rates of Growth in Latino Enrollments, 1987-1997

City	Percent Change
Somerville	301.1
Lynn	244.1
Chicopee	235.1
Salem	170.5
Methuen	140.4
Haverhill	130.3
Chelsea	126.9
State	**81.5**

Source: Massachusetts Department of Education, "Individual School Reports, October 1, 1987," Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation. Enrollment data are from Massachusetts Department of Education, "School and School Districts Profiles."

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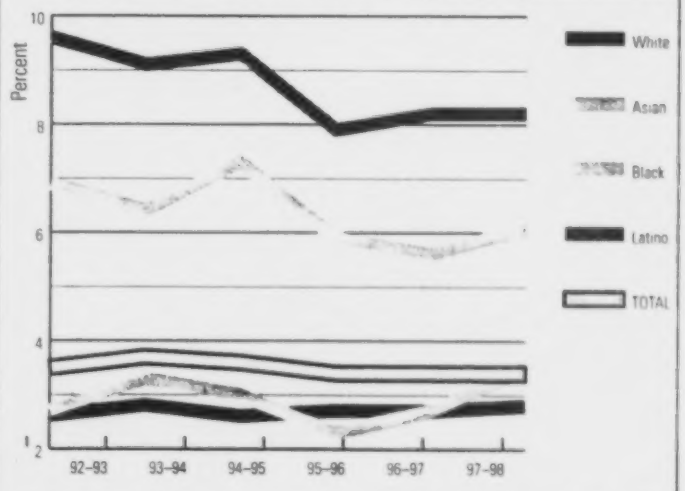
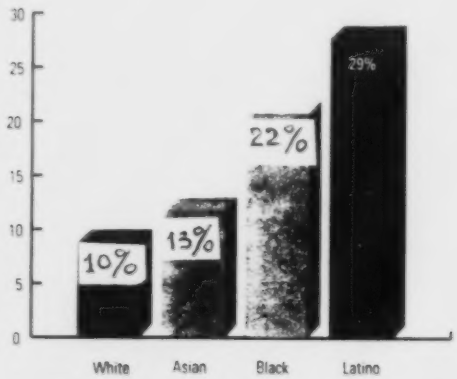
Figure 5
Massachusetts Public High School Annual Dropout Rates by Race and Ethnicity, AY 1992–1993 to AY 1997–1998



Source: *Dropout Rates in Massachusetts Public Schools: 1996–97*, Massachusetts Department of Education, February 1998, and *Dropout Rates in Massachusetts Public Schools: 1997–98*, Massachusetts Department of Education, September 1999

Figure 6
Massachusetts Public High School Projected Four-Year Cohort Dropout Rate by Race, 1998



Source: Massachusetts Department of Education, *Dropout Rates in Massachusetts Public Schools: 1997-98*, September 1999

In this report, we discuss first the Latino dropout rates over the last seven years followed by a discussion of the results of the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) tests for Latino children as possible indicators of educational outcomes for Latinos in the absence of more precise studies. We also take a look at the post-graduation plans of Latino students in Massachusetts and the number of students who continue their education. These analyses are conducted with data from the Massachusetts Department of Education.

Dropping Out

Data on the number of students who stop attending school prior to graduation for reasons other than transfer to another school were first collected in Massachusetts during the school year 1986–1987. At that time, both the annual and the projected cohort dropout rates for Latinos were the highest of all racial/ethnic groups in the state.[13] This pattern has continued, as is evident by the data presented in figures 5 and 6.[14]

Annual dropout rates for the last seven years for all racial/ethnic groups are compared in Figure 5. This shows the percentage of students from each racial/ethnic group in grades 9 through 12 who leave school prior to graduation for reasons other than transfer to another school and do not re-enroll before the following October 1. Trends over the last seven years indicate that the overall dropout rate decreased slightly during 1996 and 1997. This was true for all minority groups. But, this positive trend seems to have reversed itself in the last year when rates for all minorities increased. Annual dropout rates for Latinos have remained consistently higher than those of any other group in the state.

Cohort dropout rates measure the four-year rate of school dropout in the group of chil-

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dren that begin the 9th grade in a given year. The cohort dropout rate projects the percentage of 9th graders that is likely to drop out before finishing four years of high school. Figure 6 provides the projections developed by the Massachusetts Department of Education for the cohort that started the 9th grade in 1998 (the class of 2003). These projections show that 29 percent of the Latino students that began the 9th grade in 1998 are at high risk of dropping out. This rate is almost three times that of white 9th graders.

The high rate of school dropout among Latinos has been and continues to be a grave concern for parents and educators. One could argue that early school-reform initiatives led to a decrease in rates for all groups, but there is evidence that this decrease may be short-lived. In fact, future trends in school dropout rates are central to the concerns that black and Latino parents have about key elements of the reform initiatives as Massachusetts joins the other states that will require a passing grade in a high-stakes standardized test as a requirement for graduation. Early indications are that many Latino children and black children may be at further risk of dropping out as their scores in these tests prevent them from attaining a high-school degree.

MCAS Results

Many educators have challenged the validity of standardized tests in measuring the true educational achievement of children. This has been particularly so in the testing of children who do not belong to the dominant class, race, and/or cultural group. What these standardized tests really measure and whether or not there are racial and class biases inherent in these tests are unresolved, critical questions that have direct impact on the appropriate use of their results. The usual recommendation by educators is that standardized testing be treated as just one element of many in evaluating student performance.

Nevertheless, recent educational reform initiatives in the United States have tended to rely on standardized tests as the way to measure the educational outcomes of children. In many cases, outcome on one test determines the promotion of children from one grade to another or the graduation of high-school students.

In Massachusetts, the 1993 Educational Reform Act showcased the MCAS test as the primary measure of student achievement in required areas of knowledge given priority in the state law. These tests began to be required of 4th, 8th, and 10th graders beginning in 1998 and, in subsequent years, both the number of grades and the areas tested will be broadened. Curriculum frameworks are now being developed to assure that the material on the test is taught in the classrooms.[15]

What makes the MCAS important for both students and educators is the use that will be made of its scores. Beginning in 2001, current state educational policy will require 10th graders to obtain a passing score in math, English language arts, science and technology and social sciences in order to graduate from high school. The first graduating class that will be affected is the class of 2003. Since scores are available at both the school and classroom levels, there are also proposals to use student MCAS outcomes in the evaluation of teachers and schools.

High-stakes, exit-testing is not unique to Massachusetts. Nineteen states have exit exams required for graduation, including states with large Latino populations, such as New York,

Texas, and California. The results have been that large numbers of children, particularly black and Latino children, have not passed these tests, placing them at risk for not graduating from high school or not being promoted to the next grade.

Advocates of high-stakes testing propose that "knowing the truth" about the failure of schools to impart the knowledge that children need in order to lead useful working lives will shock the educational systems into changing the way they go about educating children and supporting their learning. Some systems are updating curricula to be more attuned to current demands. Others are being challenged to include math and science classes for all students and to implement advanced-placement classes in all schools. Still others are beginning to invest in summer school, tutoring, and after-school programs to assure that youngsters receive the extra support they need.

But there are also problems. Some of the problems relate to the fairness of testing when students, particularly weaker students and those not attending advanced classes, will be tested on material they have never been taught. Tests, rightly so, are geared to assess predetermined, expected outcomes, but there are no mechanisms in place to assure that instruction leading to those outcomes is actually talking place in the classroom for all students. This is particularly so in the early years of the reform process as teachers re-educate themselves about the requirements of the new curricula.

High-stakes testing also carries the risk of increasing the dropout rates for the most vulnerable populations. This may happen for several reasons: 1) The impact of being labeled as failures early in their education, for some as early as the 4th grade; 2) Retention in grade as a way to redress failure without taking into account the need for changing the conditions that led to student failure in the first place; and 3) The potential for Latino students in the higher grades to give up and drop out once they fail the test the first or second time.[16] Increases in dropout rates have been documented in California and Texas, systems that have already implemented this type of testing.

Testing, especially when used to evaluate whole schools or districts also affects the dynamics of the school. Many schools experience an increase in *creaming*, or the tendency to give priority to those students who seem likely to do well on the test. As a consequence, schools may counsel weak students away from school in order to guarantee better scores. This, too, increases the number of students who drop out. Secondly, cheating may increase as schools as teachers try to artificially increase student scores. The occurrence of both has already been documented in other areas of the country.

With this as a backdrop, we begin the discussion of the results of the first administration of the MCAS test. We discuss first the overall results of the test and, in particular, the racial differences in test outcomes followed by an in-depth discussion of the outcomes for Latinos in the state.

The 1998 MCAS Tests

In spring 1998, the MCAS tests began to be administered to Massachusetts students in grades 4, 8, and 10.[17] About 208,000 children from all school districts took the tests in three areas: English language arts; mathematics; and science and technology.[18] Test takers included

regular-education students, special-education students, and students with limited English proficiency.

Special attention was given to the testing of limited-English-proficiency students. These students were tested in English when they had been in school in the U.S. for more than three years or when they had been recommended for mainstream classes for the 1998-1999 school year, regardless of the years of school in the U.S. Native Spanish speakers, in some situations, were required to take the Spanish/English version of the mathematics and the science and technology tests. Included in this group were native-Spanish-speaking students who:

- had been enrolled in U.S. schools for 3 years or less;
- had been enrolled in the Transitional Bilingual Education Program or received English-as-a-Second Language support and were not recommended for mainstream classes during 1998-1999;
- were able to read and write in Spanish.[19]

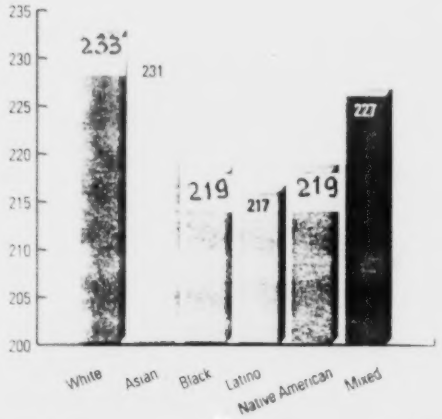
Reports of the test results provided by the Department of Education offer four levels of performance in each area of knowledge for each grade: advanced, proficient, needs improvement, and failing. It offers both a score range and a descriptive standard for each of the levels. According to the Massachusetts Department of Education, the criteria for each level are the following:

> **Advanced:** students demonstrate a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of rigorous subject matter and provide sophisticated solutions to complex problems. (Score ranges between 260-280)
>
> **Proficient:** students demonstrate a solid understanding of challenging subject matter and solve a wide variety of problems. (Score ranges between 240-259)
>
> **Needs Improvement:** students demonstrate partial understanding of subject matter and solve simple problems. (Score ranges between 220 and 239)
>
> **Failing:** students demonstrate minimal understanding of subject matter and do not solve even simple problems. (Score ranges between 200 and 219).[20]

In general, student scores on this first administration of the MCAS test were low. Statewide average scaled scores for all subjects and at all grade levels only reached the level of "needs improvement"; 52% of 10th graders and 42% of 8th graders had a "failing" score in math; and less than 11% of students (at any level) achieved an "advanced" rating in any subject (grade-4 math had the largest percentage of advanced students).[21]

As worrisome as these aggregated scores were, the fact is that they covered very deep differences among test takers. There was wide variation among school districts and among individual schools within a district.[22] Experts have pointed to both in-school and out-of-school factors that may influence student performance on standardized tests like the MCAS.[23]

Figure 7
Cumulative Average Scaled Scores by Race, MCAS, 1998



Source: Massachusetts Department of Education, *Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System, Report of 1998 Statewide and District Results by Race and Ethnicity*, June 1999.

And, as we will show in this report, there were also differences among groups of students when the race of the test taker was taken into account. These differences are large and important to consider, particularly in view of the use that will be made of the MCAS test outcomes.

Racial Differences

Results of the first set of MCAS tests in Massachusetts reveal differences in outcomes for white, black, Asian/Pacific Islander, Latino, and native-American students, as well as for students of mixed race or background.[24] The latter were reported as a separate category.

Figure 7 presents the average of the cumulative scaled scores of all grades and subject areas. The results parallel those of other standardized tests, such as the SAT and other high-stakes, exit tests: White and Asian student outcomes far outpaced those of blacks, Latinos, and native Americans. Mixed-race children had scores that were similar to those of white and Asian students. The comparison of the overall scores for each racial group, presented in Figure 7, best illustrates these differences.

The breakdown by grade and area of knowledge for each group is presented in figures 8, 9, and 10. These tables show the percentage of students in each group that scored in the failing category, according to Department of Education parameters, in each of the areas of the test: English language arts, mathematics, and science and technology. In all grades, a pattern of sharp differences in outcomes for each racial/ethnic group emerges clearly. Beginning in grade 4, Latino, black, and native-American failure rates are much higher than those of whites, Asians, and the mixed-race group. In grade 4, the differences are slightly sharper in math than in the other two areas of knowledge. Black students and Latino students have failure rates in math that are more than four times the failure rate of whites. By the 8th grade, the differences between the scores of whites and Asians and those of blacks, Latinos, and native Americans are quite pronounced in both math and science. These differences will hold through the high-school test years.

A Closer Look at the Situation of Latinos

As was true of the dropout rates, the outcomes of Latino students are the worst in the state. In every grade and across every area of knowledge, Latino students rank lower than other racial/ethnic groups. These results indicate that Latinos are the most vulnerable to the negative outcomes predicted to result from the use of such high-stakes standardized tests.

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Figure 8
Grade 4 MCAS Results By Race, 1998 (Percent Failing)

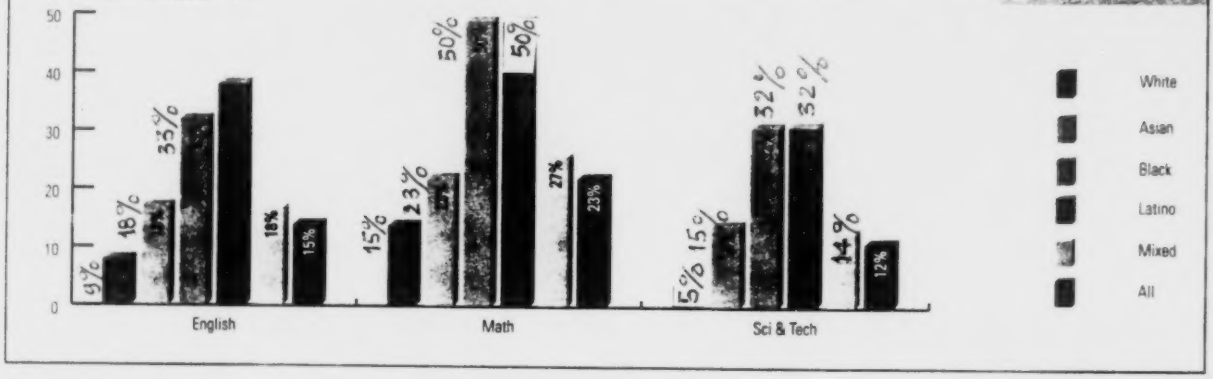


Figure 9
Grade 8 MCAS Results By Race, 1998 (Percent Failing)

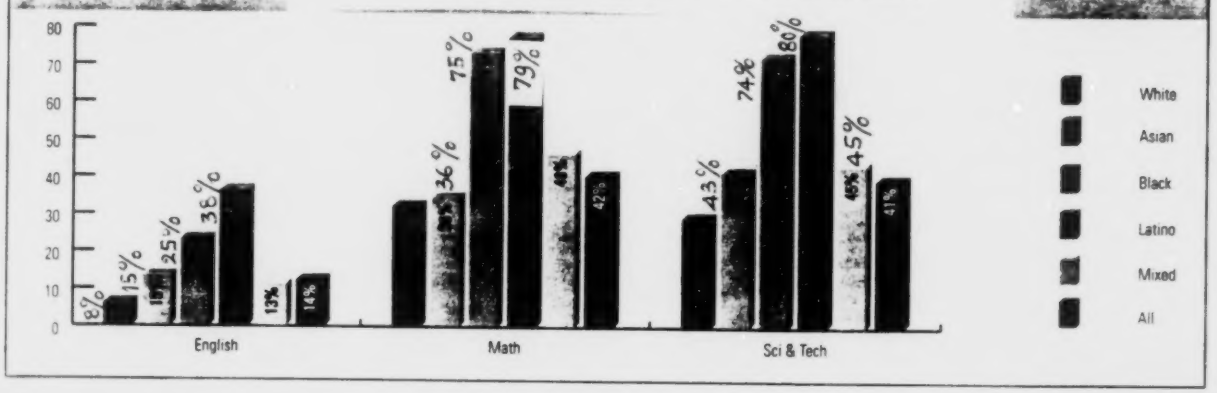
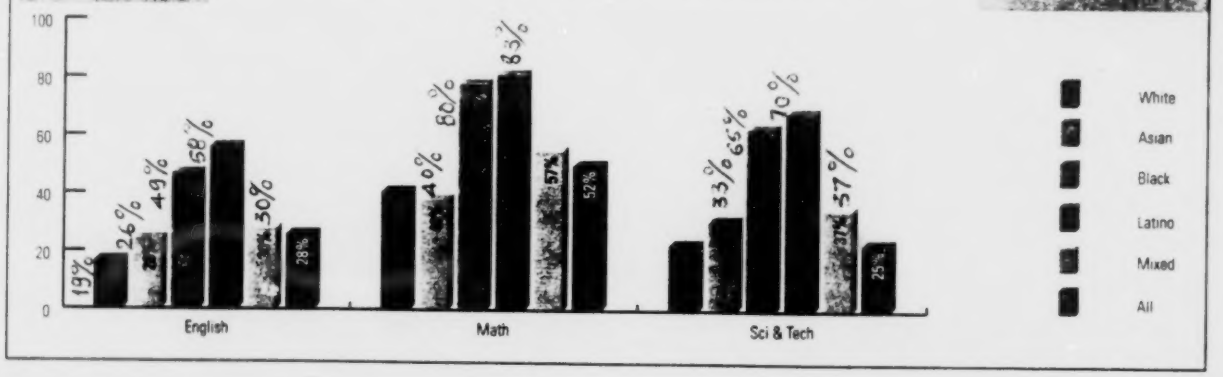


Figure 10
Grade 10 MCAS Results By Race, 1998 (Percent Failing)



Source for Figs. 8, 9, and 10: Massachusetts Department of Education. *Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System, Report of 1998 Statewide and District Results by Race and Ethnicity*, June 1999

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The Latino outcomes in the MCAS test are disheartening: The overall scores for Latinos are the worst in the state; scaled scores in all grades and in all areas were below those of the average scaled scores for the state. Scaled scores for Latinos in math and science fell within the "failing" range in both 8th and 10th grades. Scaled scores were better in English language arts in which both 4th and 8th graders scored in the "needs improvement" range.

Table 3 shows the MCAS scores for Latino students across the state. The table highlights the scores of those students at either end of the spectrum: those that achieved scores of "proficient" and above and those that failed the MCAS tests.

Overall, Latino children in the earlier grades tested better than those in the higher grades. In the fourth grade, the grade where Latinos did best, scaled scores reached "needs improvement" in all areas. In the 8th grade, it did so only in English language arts. By the 10th grade, scaled scores of Latinos reflected failing scores in all areas.

Table 3
Statewide Latino MCAS Results, 1998
(Proficient and Above, and Failing)

Grade 10		
	% Proficient and Above	% Failing
English Language Arts	11	58
Mathematics	5	83
Science and Technology	4	70
Grade 8		
	% Proficient and Above	% Failing
English Language Arts	20	38
Mathematics	6	79
Science and Technology	5	80
Grade 4		
	% Proficient and Above	% Failing
English Language Arts	3	39
Mathematics	9	50
Science and Technology	17	32

Source: Massachusetts Department of Education, *Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System, Report of 1998 Statewide and District Results by Race and Ethnicity*, June 1999.

The scores of 10th graders are significant because current state educational policy stipulates that, beginning in 2003, in order to graduate from high school, 10th graders must pass all sections of the MCAS. In 1998, 83% of Latino 10th graders scored in the failing category in math and 70% failed science and technology. If the 1998 tests were a prerequisite for a high-school diploma, as will happen in 2003, more than 80% of the Latino students graduating in the year 2000 would not receive a high-school diploma.

Students who were in grade 8 in 1998 will be impacted by this policy upon their graduation. How prepared are they for the test they will take in the 10th grade? If performance in the 8th-grade test is any indication of future test outcomes, the situation is worrisome. The 8th-grade data in table 3 reveal that 79% of the Latino students failed their math test and 80% failed science and technology. Although 8th graders were also the group that showed the highest percentage of Latinos scoring at the proficient or advanced level, the rates of failure do not augur well for their performance in grade 10.

The seriousness of the grade-10 problem for the future of Latino students is underscored when one observes Latino outcomes across school districts. Table 4 shows the percentage of Latino students that failed the mathematics section of the test in the fifteen districts with the highest Latino enrollments. These districts account for over 76% of all Latino students in the state. In general, in those districts, the 10th-grade math scores were dismal.

Across the state, in every district where there are significant numbers of Latinos, most 10th graders (over 70%) failed their math test. Chelsea had the highest percentage of students passing, 28%.

Table 4
Grade 10 MCAS Scores in Mathematics for Latinos in the 15 School Districts With Largest Latino Enrollment, 1998 (% Failing)

District	Percent Failing
State	**83**
Boston	86
Springfield	94
Lawrence	84
Worcester	86
Holyoke	95
Lowell	80
Lynn	77
Chelsea	72
New Bedford	90
Brockton	88
Fitchburg	89
Salem	84
Chicopee	97
Framingham	73
Haverhill	74
Somerville	73

Source: Massachusetts Department of Education, *Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System, Report of 1998 Statewide and District Results by Race and Ethnicity*, June 1999

The Meaning of the MCAS Scores for Latinos

In 2001, Latino 10th graders will be taking the MCAS, and if current teaching and testing methods prevail, most will fail. They will be able to take the test again and again, until 2003, when the test results will determine whether the student will graduate or not. If nothing changes, most Latino students will not graduate from high school.

It is important to keep in mind that at this point in time, schools are not yet capable of providing appropriate instruction to the less-prepared students, nor are curriculum frameworks and remedial programs in place to help vulnerable students. Therefore, unless strong measures are taken, the application of sanctions early in the process, will mean that "it is the students who will be bearing the consequences of the failure of adults to adjust."[25] In the case of Massachusetts, the consequences of this failure will weigh heaviest on Latino students.

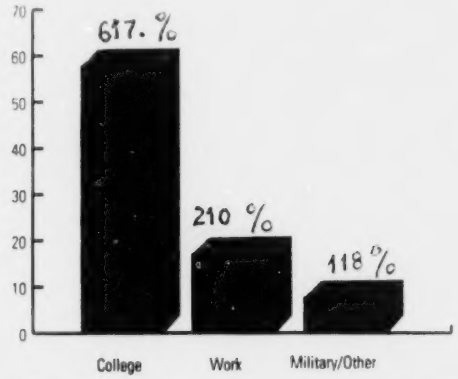
Massachusetts is at the start of its educational reform process and of its use of high-stakes testing as a measure of educational attainment for the state's students. Current proposals range from the cold assessment that "a few have to suffer" in order to improve the schooling of the many, to the proposal to award several types of high-school degrees, taking into account the student's performance in the MCAS, but not leaving anyone without a diploma. Others challenge state expenditures in education and wonder how effective they have been. Still others challenge both the fairness of the test and/or the impact that it is already having on the breadth of the curriculum offered to Massachusetts public-school students.

The reaction at the national level to this aspect of school reform and its impact on Latinos is also escalating. The President's Advisory Commission on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans concluded its 200-page report with a recommendation that calls on the Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights to look on a state-by-state basis into possible discriminatory practices in the testing of Hispanics.[26] Parents and advocacy groups in Texas have appealed to the courts for a ban on the use of high-stakes testing in determining which students will receive a high-school diploma.[27] The American Civil Liberties Union,

acting on behalf of black and Latino students in a California high school, have sued the state and the school district charging discrimination because of the lack of access of these students to advanced-placement classes.

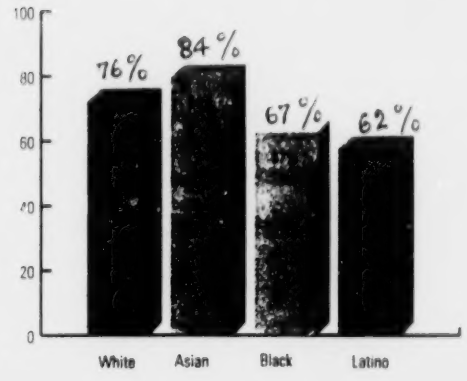
Children's Dreams

Figure 11
After-High-School Plans of Latino High School Graduates, 1996



Source: Massachusetts Department of Education, *Plans of High School Graduates: Class of 1996*, September, 1997.

Figure 12
Percent Planning to Attend College, by Race, 1996



Source: Massachusetts Department of Education, *Plans of High School Graduates: Class of 1996*, September, 1997.

In many ways, the harsh implications of the preceding discussion are sobering. Under current policy, most Latino children will not graduate from high school. Without a high-school diploma, it is most likely they will not be able to go on to college. But, how does this scenario compare with Latino children's aspirations? What do they see in their future? What would they like to do? Every year the Department of Education asks graduating seniors about their plans. We end our report with a presentation of the after-high-school plans of Latino students.

In terms of their aspirations, Latino high-school graduates are not that different from graduates from other racial/ethnic groups in the desire to go to college. Of Latino graduating seniors, almost 62% said they planned to attend college: Twenty-seven percent reported wanting to attend a four-year college, 31% said they planned to attend a two-year college. Twenty-one percent of Latino graduates reported planning to go to work after high school and 11.6% said they were thinking of the military as an option.

Unlike the wide differences in educational outcomes among the different groups, the aspirations of high-school graduates from all groups are remarkably similar. Most high-school graduates of every group planned to attend college. Although there were some differences, these were significantly less than those found in other areas of their experience.

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Conclusions and Recommendations

The findings of this report, coming at the end of a decade of school reform and forty years since Latinos began to settle in Massachusetts in large numbers, present some difficult challenges to both the Latino community and the school system. Latino enrollments continue to grow rapidly. In some cities, the number of Latino students has doubled or even tripled in the last ten years. This rapid rate of growth in enrollments presents school systems with the need to adjust rapidly to a changing student population with a different set of demands and needs. In light of these changes, we recommend the following: 1) Studies should focus on how systems adjust to rapid change; 2) Attention should also be paid to the transformation that school systems need to make to be responsive to new groups and to be effective in providing education to a different set of students; 3) Policies and resources should be directed to provide support to school systems in the midst of rapid and large demographic transitions; and 4) The Department of Education should postpone such devastating sanctions as denying children a high-school diploma until it can assure taxpayers and parents that it has put in place the kind of educational program that will allow all children to succeed.

Current educational reform policies in Massachusetts present great contradictions to Latinos. On the one hand, without a doubt, Latinos stand to benefit greatly from true educational reform. To envision high standards, to expect all students to meet them, and to provide all students with the means by which to achieve these goals, will benefit all students, including Latinos.

On the other hand, Latinos bear the highest burden as the process of reform becomes institutionalized. School systems are not yet ready to guarantee that all students have access to the type of education that leads to proficient or advanced scores on the MCAS. Teachers have not been trained in the new curriculum requirements; many still debate whether they represent an improvement. Supports are not yet in place to guarantee that children who don't do well in the earlier grades receive the help they need to succeed in the 10th-grade testing. Interventions are not yet in place to address the needs of 10th graders who fail the test.

As a result, if current policy prevails, many children will be denied high-school diplomas. Latinos will be disproportionately represented among those children. Besides having an irreparable effect on the life and economic future of these children, the inability to obtain a high-school diploma by such a large percentage of Latino high-school students will have a devastating effect on the economic development of the Latino community and on the economy of the state.

Children who repeatedly fail the test may drop out of school, which has been the experience in other states. Although there has been some improvement in the high-school dropout rate among Latino children in Massachusetts public schools over the last few years, the rate remains quite high—the highest of all groups. Any policy that will result in the increase of these already unacceptable rates is an initiative that educational policy makers should undertake with great caution, if at all.

Doing well in school is the best antidote for dropping out. All children like to achieve, feel frustrated when they do not, and many leave school in the midst of this frustration. Research points to schools, parents, and communities, as well as to the children themselves, to play an important role in the process of improving student achievement. Some ingredients that lead to success in school include:

- high expectations of all students by teachers and schools;
- a curriculum that reflects the diversity of the experience of children in the classroom;
- programs that support the achievement of vulnerable students and encourage them to remain in school;
- after-school programs that address homework completion, particularly for children from families whose educational background or language barriers prevent them from assisting their children with homework;
- parents that prioritize education and communicate its value to their children;
- families and communities that nurture their children and expect excellent performance of them;
- drug-free, well-fed children who are focused on learning.

School systems need to examine how well they are serving children in meeting these goals. Failing large numbers of children will not ultimately serve the goals of the system. True educational reform does not come from failing students, but creating the kind of educational system that will allow them to succeed.

End Notes

1 Task Force of Children Out of School, *The Way We Go to School: The Exclusion of Children in Boston* (Boston: Task Force on Children Out of School, 1970).

2 Ann Wheelock, *The Status of Latino Students in Massachusetts Public Schools: Direction for Policy Research in the 1990's* (Boston: The Mauricio Gastón Institute for Latino Community Development and Public Policy, October 1990).

3 Massachusetts Department of Education, *Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System, Report of 1998 Statewide and District Results by Race and Ethnicity* (Boston: Massachusetts Department of Education, June 1999).

4 Andrés Torres and Lisa Chavez, *Latinos in Massachusetts: An Update* (Boston: Mauricio Gastón Institute for Latino Community Development and Public Policy, UMASS Boston, 1998).

5 Ralph Rivera, *Latinos in Massachusetts and the 1990 U.S. Census: Growth and Geographic Distribution* (Boston: Mauricio Gastón Institute for Latino Community Development and Public Policy, UMASS Boston, 1991), p. 6.

6 Rivera, *Latinos in Massachusetts and the 1990 U.S. Census*, p. 11.

7 Rivera, *Latinos in Massachusetts and the 1990 U.S. Census*, p. 8.

8 Rivera, *Latinos in Massachusetts and the 1990 U.S. Census*, p. 8.

9 Torres and Chavez, *Latinos in Massachusetts*, p. 3.

10 Geoff Beane, *The Puerto Rican Community of Boston* (Boston: Hispanic Office of Planning and Evaluation, 1978).

11 Ralph Rivera, "Introduction," in Ralph Rivera, et al. (eds.), *Latino Health Policy Symposium Proceedings* (Boston: Mauricio Gastón Institute for Latino Community Development and Public Policy, UMASS Boston, 1996), p. 2.

12 Listing only includes districts with more than one thousand Latino students.

13 Ann Wheelock, *The Status of Latino Students*, p. 36.

14 Rates reported are adjusted to reflect the return to school of some children the following year after dropping out.

15 Interestingly, the development of strict curriculum frameworks designed to guarantee the teaching of material deemed essential to a successful performance in the MCAS is curtailing the implementation of more broad-based, creative curriculums that are

common in suburban schools and in some experimental urban schools. For an insightful analysis of this problem see, Jon Marcus, "The Shocking Truth about our Public Schools," *Boston Magazine*, October 1999.

16 George Madeus and Diana Pullin, "Questions to Ask When Evaluating a High-Stakes Testing Program," The Consortium on Equity in Standards and Testing, Boston College (http://www.csteep.bc.edu/ctest).

17 The MCAS tests were administered at district and regional schools, vocational schools, charter schools, special-education schools, and agricultural and technical schools.

18 *The Boston Globe*, "Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) Scores for Boston Schools," December 11, 1998.

19 Massachusetts Department of Education, *Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System, Report of 1998 Statewide and District Results*, p. 2.

20 A score of 220 was set as the passing score by the Massachusetts Board of Education on November 23, 1999. See Associated Press, "Board Sets Low Bar on MCAS Passing Score," November 23, 1999.

21 Massachusetts Department of Education. *Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System, Report of 1998 Statewide and District Results*, p. 3.

22 *The Boston Globe*, "Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) Scores for Boston Schools," December 11, 1998.

23 Robert Gaudet, *Effective School Districts in Massachusetts: A study of student performance on the 1998 MCAS tests* (University of Massachusetts, Donahue Institute, February 1999).

24 All racial identifications are self-reports.

25 Quote by Richard Ellmore in David Corcoran, "Requiring Standard Tests for Graduation: 2 Views," *The New York Times* (on the Web), August 4, 1999.

26 President's Advisory Commission on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans, *A Report to the Nation: Policies and Issues on Testing Hispanic Students in the United States* (Washington, D.C.: White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans, September 1999).

27 Ben Wildavsky, "Achievement Testing Gets Its Day In Court: A Key Texas Case Goes To Trial As Minority Groups Seek To Stop A School Reform Trend," *U.S. News And World Report* (web version), September 27, 1999.

Listing of Selected Education Resources

Concilio Hispano, AHORA Program, 105 Windsor St., Cambridge, MA 02139.

Greater Boston Interfaith Organization (GBIO), 307 Bowdoin Street, Dorchester, MA 02122.

The Harvard Journal of Hispanic Policy, 67 Winthrop St., Cambridge, MA 02138.

Hispanic Office of Planning & Evaluation/Fuego Latino de Jovenes, 165 Brookside Ave., Jamaica Plain, MA 02130.

Institute for Learning and Teaching, University of Massachusetts Boston, 100 Morrissey Blvd., Boston, MA 02125-3393.

Latino Parent Association (LPA), 555 Amory Street, Jamaica Plain, MA 02130.

League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), Northeast Region-MA, 21 Muriel Rd., Swampscott, MA 01907-2643.

Massachusetts Association for Bilingual Education (MABE), P.O. Box 5471, Bradford, MA 01835.

Massachusetts Board of Education, 1 Ashburton Place, Room 1401, Boston, MA 02108.

Massachusetts Coalition for Bilingual Education, c/o Massachusetts English Plus, 126 High Street, Boston, MA 02110.

Massachusetts Coalition for Higher Standards, c/o Massachusetts Insight Education, 1030 Mass. Ave., Cambridge, MA 02138.

Massachusetts Department of Education, 350 Main Street, Malden, Massachusetts 02148-5023.

Massachusetts Education Initiative for Latino Students (MEILS), 566 Commonwealth Avenue, Boston, MA 02215-2520.

Massachusetts Institute for Social and Economic Research (MISER), University of Massachusetts, Thompson Hall, Box 37515, Amherst, MA 01003-7515.

Multicultural Education and Training Advocacy (META), 240 Elm Street, Suite 22, Somerville, MA 02144.

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The Mauricio Gastón Institute for Latino Community Development and Public Policy was established at the University of Massachusetts Boston through the initiative of Latino community activists, academicians, and the Massachusetts State Legislature, in response to a need for improved understanding of Latino experiences and living conditions in Massachusetts. The task of the institute is to inform policy makers about issues vital to the Commonwealth's growing Latino community and to provide this community with the information and analysis necessary for effective participation in public policy development.

The Mauricio Gastón Institute for Latino Community Development and Public Policy

University of Massachusetts Boston
100 Morrissey Boulevard
Boston, MA 02125-3393

Telephone: 617-287-5790
Fax: 617-287-5788
E-mail: Gaston.Institute@umb.edu
Website: http://www.gaston.umb.edu

Mauricio Gastón Institute
University of Massachusetts Boston
100 Morrissey Boulevard
Boston, MA 02125-3393

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